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ABSTRACT

In 1980, Oregon State University began a program going beyond the usual procedure for students of English as a second language (ESL), which involved putting them in intensive English programs until they could pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language and then sending them on to a regular academic program. It was found that this traditional approach left students underprepared in more than language skills for further college work. The new program, limited at present to U.S. citizens and permanent residents, primarily Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans, begins with comprehensive placement testing for language, math, writing, and reading. Academic advising follows, an important process for students who feel that developmental classes and general education inhibit their progress toward a specialized degree or who have little direction or understanding of the reasons for the curriculum design. Personal counseling is also provided for housing problems, financial aid, and interpersonal relations. Developmental classes in English, reading, writing, math, personal development, and native language literacy follow, and other services available include tutoring for any course on request, cultural enrichment or extracurricular activities, and other student personnel services. Among the mistakes made to date are lack of adequate early orientation, inadequate communication concerning cheating and plagiarism, and inadequate communication about deadlines and timelines. However, the program has high retention and graduation rates and provides a broad range of needed services for these students. (MSE)

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Integration of ESL/LEP Students into the University
Paper presented at TESOL Summer Meeting, July 14, 1984

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Integration of ESL/LEP Students into the University

Lita J. Verts

Introduction

From September 1974 until September 1980, I was a full-time teacher in the English Language Institute, teaching ESL students from mixed language backgrounds. We happily plodded along measuring our success by the numbers of students who completed our classes, passed the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) at a score high enough to allow them to be admitted into the university, and left us to go on to higher pursuits. In 1980 I was hired to direct a program for students who were admitted to the university, but who needed academic support. Among these students, who are mainly native English speakers, there are two groups for whom English is a second language; S.E. Asian refugees and Hispanic students basically from the migrant stream. Now I am on the other side of the admissions fence, and the perspective is entirely different.

First, just because a student has acquired an arbitrary level of English competence does not mean that he/she is ready to compete at the university on a level equal to the native

speaker. I am well aware that foreign students do not want to hear that there is something more they need to do in preparation for university work besides learn English, but it remains nonetheless true that there is a great deal. Some of these things are cultural; rhetorical style (American English goes from assumption to proof to conclusion in a direct line as opposed to the Oriental spiral style and the Arabic zigzag style); classroom behaviour (interactive rather than passive); approach to teachers (the right to question in class); and the importance of timelines and deadlines. Some of these things are truly academic and some are cultural. At any rate they must be able to cope with all these factors in order to succeed at the university. TOEFL alone is not enough.

Second, they are frequently well prepared in certain areas, e.g. math or pure science, but they do not realize that universities require more than an ability to factor major equations in order to obtain a degree in engineering. History, literature, anthropology often seem like an unnecessary waste of time to them and they refuse to believe that they really must take such courses in order to graduate. They fight it, put it off, give such courses only slight attention until they find themselves in a tight academic bind and their whole careers threatened because they would not take these requirements seriously.

Third, there is personal adjustment to living in this culture. They are in a foreign culture to begin with and then they add the subculture of the university. Socialization is difficult and sometimes nearly impossible. Failure to acquire the proper socialization can result in intense loneliness, deviant behaviour, and in extreme cases, trouble with the law.

It is my personal opinion that to admit a student into the university based on TOEFL scores, register him/her for classes, and then abandon him/her to the storms of the campus is nothing less than immoral. Unfortunately, the program that I am associated with, Special Services Project within the Educational Opportunities Program, cannot serve all the foreign students on this campus. In fact, we are limited to U.S. citizens or permanent residents, hence the makeup of our ESL populations, S.E. Asians and Hispanics. These students do, however, make up nearly 40% of our total program and we feel that the program could be viewed as a pilot project for the development of similar programs directed to the general body of foreign students.

Where do our Limited English Proficient (LEP) students come from? In 1975 we had one S.E. Asian student; as the refugees began to come into this county our student population from this group began to rise. At one time the State of Oregon was receiving 3,500 refugees a month. These students are now completing high school and matriculating to the university. We

currently have what we consider to be a stable group of 85 Asians including 61 from the S.E. Asian refugee group in the project at all levels, and they are beginning to graduate in significant numbers.

Before 1982 we had a small, fluctuating group of Hispanic students, mostly from the local area. In 1982 we applied for and were granted money from the Federal government to conduct a College Assistance Migrant Program. Although there is no ethnic criterion attached to this grant, reality is that 99% of these students are Hispanic, and nearly 80% are second language speakers. Our Hispanic population took a huge jump with the advent of this program, but it is too new for any program participants to have graduated. We currently have 68 Hispanics in the program and are recruiting new freshmen for fall 84.

I will give you a brief overview of the program, some parts of which apply only to the LEP students, and some of which apply to all our students, LEP and native speakers alike. And I will be using some generalizations about the two ethnic groups, knowing that there are individual differences within each and that all generalizations have an element of danger.

Testing

We have a comprehensive placement testing program for all the students in our program, both native and non-native speakers. When we first began we gave all students a battery of five tests, three from the Descriptive Test of Language Skills (DTLS) and two from the Descriptive Test of Mathematics Skills (DTMS) published by the College Board. What we quickly found out is that these tests were great for our native speakers but they told us absolutely nothing useful about our LEP students. We placed them into developmental classes based on the results and found that they were misplaced either too high or too low. We had accurate results for our native speakers, but were missing the mark widely for the LEP students. So we began tinkering with the system.

The first year of change, we chose the Michigan Test of Aural Comprehension (MTAC), Structure Test-English Language (STEL), and the Gates-McGinty Reading Test, Form E. The Gates-McGinty was valuable, the MTAC was invaluable, and the STEL was useless. Two out of three isn't bad. At the same time, we referred our S.E. Asian students to the Mathematics Department to take the general math placement exams, because we found that they generally would be able not only to take the general exams, but to do very well on them. As these math tests begin at a higher level than our departmental ones do, it gave a more accurate picture of their math skills. So now we were testing on the language skills of the S.E. Asians, the language and math skills of the Hispanics,

and we still had holes in our testing/advising program.

The second year we threw the STEL away and added a 20-minute free writing sample. This proved so valuable that we are now adding it to the testing of all our students even though it adds a large burden to the staff who have to score it. We test approximately 130 students at the beginning of fall term, and all the tests except the free writing sample are computer scored. We now have a test battery that tests the listening, reading, and writing skills of all our LEP students and gives us an accurate picture before we have to advise them into classes.

But wait! We aren't finished yet! In spite of the accuracy of these tests, we still found that the reading skills of some of our Hispanic students were not improving in the reading classes as we would have predicted based on past performance of other students. What we have found is that they are not literate in Spanish either, and therefore, we were not getting a transfer effect in the reading classes. Therefore, this fall we will begin a program of testing them in their Spanish skills as well. We will use an informal reading inventory test developed by Dr. Steve Moreno of San Diego and normed on the Spanish taught in Mexican schools. At the same time we are developing a program in conjunction with the Spanish Department on campus to help them become literate in their first language. More about this later when I discuss the developmental classes.

At this point I think we have a reasonably accurate and comprehensive testing program for our LEP students. I make no promises, however, that we will not change again. Our purpose is to get as accurate a picture of our students skills as we can before we advise them into a single university class. We will do anything to improve this program.

Counseling/Advising

Armed with the test results, the high school transcripts, and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT), or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) scores we are now ready to advise our students into classes. Many of our S.E. Asian students declare majors in one of the engineering areas or in computer science. Few seem to opt for social science or humanities majors. This poses a unique set of circumstances which I alluded to above. Many refuse to believe that they must take the 12 hours of humanities, 12 hours of social science, and 9 hours of communications demanded by the university, and that for these courses they really do need to improve their English skills. They also tend to see developmental classes as obstructing the orderly and quick progress toward a degree. In the catalog, it says that a degree takes 12 quarters; that is

what they intend to spend on campus. In reality, only 16% of all entering freshmen ever graduate in 4 years. To get many students to accept that argument is often a monumental task. The S.E. Asians especially seem to be under intense family pressure to finish in 4 years, and they also take a lot of their advising from their peer group. This is understandable in light of the cultural factors involved where there are upwardly mobile, success oriented families on the one hand and where one does not go outside the family/friend group for advice or help on the other. It does also make our job more difficult. We can advise that ignoring our guidance will only lead to difficulty, but it often takes the actual experience of failure itself to get the point across. We sometimes have to let a student do as he pleases and fail before he is willing to accept the program. Sometimes we have no control, because students may agree to a suggested course schedule while they are talking with a counselor, and then register for something entirely different.

With the Hispanic students the problem is usually the reverse. They frequently have not even thought about going to college until their senior year in high school or even much later. Many come to us without having graduated from high school, but having completed a GED instead. They have matriculated more because some person has said that they could and that there is a support program for them. Often there is no clear direction and little

idea of what they are capable of, much less what they want to major in or what they ultimately want to do with their lives. Sometimes they declare a major based on little knowledge and unrealistic assumptions about what it takes to complete that course. They do take direction about what to enroll in, but often with no idea of why. Their first year becomes one of probing and questioning and trying to find that direction.

At any rate, we do our best to advise students into courses that will give them the best start toward a degree. Our advising procedure does not end with the first quarter or even the first year. As long as a student is in school and enrolled in our program we monitor and advise, up to and including both junior and senior audits of their transcripts.

In addition to advising concerning academic matters, we conduct a program of personal counseling. Each student is assigned a personal counselor who is available to help the student with problem solving in any area. We deal with housing problems (often a major area of concern), financial aid, and even personal problems in the arena of inter-personal relations. The purpose of this counseling program is to solve little problems before they become so large that they interfere with the progress toward a degree. We have on occasion even had to concern ourselves with students who became embroiled with the local law enforcement officials. At any rate, our counselors are available on call and

the students know it and take advantage of it.

The other aspect of our counseling program is that we try to keep counselors on staff who can be role models for our students. We have been very successful in keeping Hispanic counselors on staff, but we have had very little luck in getting S.E. Asian counselors. We advertised widely for a peer counselor for this group and had no applicants. In the fall of 1983, I realized that there was a peer counselor working for them, but it was a student from Viet Nam who had been successful in his program and had simply taken it on himself to act in this capacity. Cultural factors account for both these situations. First, the factor that prohibits taking the problems outside the family/close friend circle and second, the factor that informed this student that "his people" needed his help. As long as we have Chin we are in good shape; I don't know what we will do after he graduates.

Developmental Classes

So we have tested the students and we have advised them. What do we do next? We put them in the prescribed developmental classes. (See Appendix for a full list of classes under our control). There are three sections of English for Bilingual

Students. These are actually three distinct classes: one is for native English speakers who have bidialectal problems (e.g. Black English); one is for Hispanic students; and one is for S.E. Asian students. Splitting the sections up in this manner allows us to deal with each set of discrete problems directly without the distraction of dealing with different, unrelated problems in the same classroom.

This class has a developmental history of its own. It was begun in 1975 as a class for Hispanics only. During that first year we realized that what we were doing on a bilingual basis, needed to be done on a bidialectal basis also, so it was expanded to include any student with developmental grammar problems. With the influx of the refugees we added the third section, all in an attempt to give the students as much of a head start as possible.

We have several other language classes also. (See Appendix for complete list of writing and reading improvement classes.) Reading for the Social Sciences (LS 199e) was created in response to a need of the S.E. Asian students who seemed to have adequate vocabulary in math and hard sciences, but were struggling in social science courses. One class which is not on the list is our own section of English composition (Wr 121). It is taught on the basis of when the only credentialed teacher is available, and unfortunately, the schedule precludes that course being taught

more than one term per academic year. However, with the list of classes that we can teach we are able to bring our students up to functional levels before they have to attack university classes that require large amounts of writing or reading.

There is a comparable list of mathematics courses. As a general rule, the S.E. Asian students come in to us with math skills more advanced than anything we teach, and also as a general rule, they do very well in the university math classes. Our Hispanic students generally take at least one of our math courses before taking Math 101 through the university Math Dept.

One of the most valuable courses that we offer is Personal Development (Psy 111). It is during this course that we are able to address many of the cultural problems that can give all our students, and especially the LEP students, so much heartache if they are left alone. Discussions in these classes range from time management to dating, from sexism and racism to inter-personal relations with a sales clerk. It is during these sessions that students have an opportunity to ask questions, in a non-threatening atmosphere, about how to get along not only in the standard white culture, but also in this subculture we call a university.

All of our classes carry elective credit so that the student does not feel that he/she is wasting time. Although few apply on

graduation requirements (Wr 121 and Psy 111 are the exceptions), all carry elective hours that factor into the final 192 a student must have. This is an important point. If students were required to take developmental courses without credit the frustration level would become unsupportable, we feel, and they would be reluctant to do so even though they knew it was necessary. This is especially true of those students who are highly motivated to finish in 4 years or as early as possible.

All of our courses are taught by our staff, accredited through the departments which own the numbers, but paid for and supervised by us. This is also important, because we have immediate access to any pertinent information about the students performance in the classes. If they have difficulty with the material we can assign a tutor; if they have personality conflicts with the teachers or other students we can intervene before they become major problems; if after all our planning the student is misplaced, we can move him/her before a whole quarter is wasted.

Now, to the program we are currently working on with the Spanish Department. We found that many of our Hispanic students were not literate in their own language. We approached the Spanish Department with a request that they institute a program to change this situation and they were most cooperative. Beginning in the fall, there will be one class open only to

Hispanic students to give them reading and writing in literary Spanish. We are very excited about the prospects, because we feel that it will address two problems simultaneously; 1) give them the feeling of pride in their own culture and the feeling that they do not have to abandon that culture in order to be successful at this basically white university; and 2) allow the element of transfer to occur between the Spanish and English learning.

Other Services

We have two other components to our program that should be mentioned briefly. One is the tutoring section. Any student is eligible to receive a tutor for any course on request. It is not unusual to find a student using a tutor in three out of four courses. Our tutors are recruited in three ways; pay, credit, or volunteer. They are closely monitored and carefully screened. They are also required to go through a training program at the beginning of their tenure with us.

The other component is the cultural enrichment program. We encourage students to participate in the Hispanic Student Union, the S.E. Asian organizations, and any other pertinent group. We make tickets available to them for the plays at Mitchell

Playhouse and the Cortright Theater (both on campus). In the fall we take a group to Ashland, Oregon to the Shakespeare Theater. Although these are mixed groups, because they are open to all our students, there is always a high percentage of both the LEP groups attending these events.

We also publish a monthly newsletter for all students, and we have an Honor roll reception once a term for those who made the Honor Roll the term before.

We supply a full range of services to our students. They never have to feel that there is no one to go to when they need help, or even just someone to talk to.

Results

I have told you what we do, but I have written enough grant proposals to know that that is not enough. I also must tell you what good all this does, and what mistakes we have made.

We have had some areas of failure which we must be honest about. One, we have yet to devise an early orientation program that can convince the highly motivated, science oriented student that he/she must pay attention to the General Education requirements. In 1981, the university Admissions Committee

mandated any S.E. Asian student who scored less than 30 on the Test of Standard Written English (a subdivision of the SAT) into our program. They also mandated that any students so admitted must take our advice or be not registered. This was a good idea on the surface, but it did not work. It caused frustration and bitterness among the students. They perceived it as a way to hold them in the university longer than necessary. They saw it as a barrier to their orderly progress toward a degree, even though it was pointed out to them that it was an effort to smooth the path to success, not impede it. We have since had this mandate removed, and returned to advising rather than requiring. We are still faced with some students who nod politely in their advising sessions, accept the course request forms, and proceed to register for entirely different schedules. Only after having one or two disastrous quarters do they decide that maybe we know what we are talking about.

We consistently have one or two failures of communications with students concerning the university concept of cheating and plagiarism. In cultures where the most heinous sin is to refuse to help your friend, the concept of refusing to give the answers on a test when asked is completely incomprehensible. We have yet to go through an entire academic year without one or more crises concerning cheating arising. American university professors are very touchy about it, and many, it is fair to say, have little

empathy with this cultural difference.

We struggle constantly with the concept of deadlines and timelines. The concept that "due by Friday" means "due by Friday" and not "maybe I'll get it done over the weekend" is not always taken at face value. When grades drop because papers and assignments are late, surprise, hurt, indignation are frequently the reaction.

These failures are individual and perhaps unavoidable. The greatest fault that I see in our program is its limitations on enrollment. We are limited to citizens and permanent residents. Similar programs should be open to all LEP students in this or any university. In the long run, it comes down to hard dollars. Our program is supported by a combination of state and federal dollars that have the strings put on them at the legislative level and which we are powerless to remove. University budgets are under increasing pressure to use each dollar efficiently, and new programs in all areas are having a difficult time getting started. On the other hand, every time a student matriculates to the university, stays for one or more terms and drops out, it costs the institution money. It changes the ratio of academic terms provided to numbers of degrees granted, a ratio that every university is diligently striving to reduce. The ⁺initiation of such supportive programs for foreign or second language students makes good sense, but it has to be sold to the administrative

structures.

Now for our successes.

Although our program was begun in the late Sixties as a minority program, we now have 20% S.E. Asian and 20% Hispanic students in our population. Our retention rate and our graduation rate for the Special Services Project runs a full four points ahead of the rates for the university as a whole. The retention rate for the Hispanic students alone is 57% compared with less than 10% before the program was instituted. In our last graduating class, there were 6 S.E. Asian students and 5 Hispanic students out of a total of 30 graduates. We can safely expect both these figures to rise in the next few years as the main body of S.E. Asian population is just beginning to complete their work, and the efforts of our recently expanded Hispanic program begins to bear fruit.

In conclusion, we have a broad range of support services individually tailored to the needs of our LEP students, and we are successfully graduating these students. Their needs go far beyond any arbitrary acquisition of English, and if these needs are not addressed they can and do lead to failure. It is imperative not only that the students know this but that the universities which accept foreign student acknowledge both this fact and their responsibilities to provide such services, or a

modified program of services, to the students that they accept. It is the only honorable course. Besides, it is also cost effective.

Appendix

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR EOP AND ASSOCIATED CLASSES

Educational Opportunities Program classes are designed to assist the student in developing the academic skills necessary to be competitive at Oregon State University. All classes are limited in size and the course material is adapted to individual needs wherever appropriate. On the basis of academic placement tests given during Fall Term orientation, recommendations are made for enrollment in those EOP classes expected to be most helpful to the student. EOP students may themselves elect to enroll in particular classes. Enrollment in all EOP classes is subject to approval by the instructor and the Academic Coordinator. All classes carry credit as indicated and are graded except where noted.

ED 199R Special Studies/Reading non-graded (P/N) 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

An intensive individualized skill-building program which employs a wide range of teaching techniques. Open to students who have difficulty with the basics as well as to those who wish to strengthen already developed skills. May be repeated for maximum of 9 credit hours.

LS 199E Reading for the Social Sciences graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Designed to assist students in processing literature in the Social Sciences and Humanities. The course is individualized. Students who are weak in both areas (to meet university requirements for graduation) are encouraged to enroll in the course.

UNIV 100X Methods of Study graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Designed to assist students in developing proper study habits, successful note-taking, examination expertise, etc. Normally open only to freshmen and sophomores.

ENG 112X English for Bilingual Students graded 3 credits Fall, Winter

A course designed for students with other than standard English as their first language/dialect. The aim of English 112X is to develop facility in the use of standard English as a tool for university communication without denigrating the student's first language/dialect. Stresses standard English as a functional language.

ENG 112A English for Bilingual Students graded 3 credits Fall

A course designed for Special Services students only. For those students for whom English is a second language.

ENG 113X English for Bilingual Students graded 3 credits Winter, Spring

Stresses paragraph building with a programmed method. Especially for students who need organizational skills in writing for the university classroom.

WR 115A Preparatory English Composition graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Review of the elements of composition. Deals with methods of exposition and style. Provides extensive writing practice and prepares the student to take the required university composition course WR 121. Does NOT replace WR 121.

ENG 116A Vocabulary Building graded 3 credits Winter, Spring

A "systems approach" to the study of words and their proper usage is employed--NOT a memorization course. Emphasis is on the various meanings of words in use throughout the university. This class is especially helpful to freshmen but is open to all EOP students.

SED 199M College Arithmetic graded 4 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

An intensive review of the basic arithmetic operations including sections on percents, measurement and geometry and signed numbers. Math anxiety and ways to overcome it will be discussed.

Recommended for the student who has not had much success with mathematics and/or has been away from mathematics for several years. Prerequisite: appropriate placement score.

SED 199N Beginning Algebra graded 4 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Designed to develop basic algebraic skills. Thoroughly covers linear equations in one variable and word problems leading to linear equations in one variable with introductory material on graphing, exponents, polynomials and factoring.

Recommended for the mature student who needs a first course in algebra. Intended to prepare the student for MTH 100A. Prerequisite: passing grade in SED 199M or appropriate placement score.

MTH 100A Intermediate Algebra graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Graphing systems of linear equations, quadratic equations, operations on rational expressions and fractional equations, graphing quadratics and systems of quadratic equations, fractional exponents, radicals and radical equations. Emphasis on applications of the above topics in various academic fields.

PSY 111A Personal Development non-graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Course content is aimed toward self-understanding, the development of positive self-concepts, group adjustment and learning the skills necessary for university success. The instructor is assisted by EOP peer group leaders who work in small groups with the students. This course is highly recommended for freshmen and certain transfer students.

LS 306A Project: Peer Counseling Techniques non-graded 3 credits Spring

A course designed to prepare students to function as group leaders for PSY 111A. Open only to those upperclassmen who show leadership skills, maturity, seriousness of purpose and are approved for enrollment by the instructor.

LS 306B Project: Peer Counseling non-graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

A course offering field experience in peer counseling. Students enrolled serve as group leaders for PSY 111A. Open only to sophmores or above with instructor's approval. Prerequisite: LS 306A.

ASSOCIATED COURSES

SED 199 Special Topics in Science graded 3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

The course examines the fundamentals of science and introduces students to the uses and techniques of the laboratory. A "fun while learning" approach is used which does not, however, detract from the academic nature of the course. This course is taught by professors in the OSU Department of Science Education and is open to EOP students when recommended by the Academic Coordinator.

ED 199A Special Studies: Tutoring non-graded, 1-3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring

Especially selected student volunteers meet individually with EOP students who need academic assistance with coursework. This activity is treated as an independent study. Prospective tutors apply to the EOP Learning Center and are approved for the course by the Academic Coordinator. Limited to freshmen and sophmores.

ED 406B Project: Tutoring non-graded 1-3 credits Fall, Winter, Spring P/NP

As described above. Limited to juniors and seniors.

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